

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 PHNOM 05377 241339Z

53

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 IO-10 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 SY-05 OMB-01 TRSE-00 OPR-02

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FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9961

INFO CINCPAC HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY SAIGON PRIORITY

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 5377

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, CB

SUBJECT: MARCH 23 AND 24, THE 82ND AND 83RD DAYS OF THE OFFENSIVE

REF: PHNOM PENH 5253

1. SUMMARY. THE AIRLIFT REMAINED SUSPENDED OVER THE WEEKEND, BUT RESUMED MARCH 24. MANY OF THE ENEMY ROCKETS DIRECTED AT POCHENTONG LANDED CLOSE TO THE AIRLIFT AREA, WHILE A NUMBER OF THOSE IN PHNOM PENH LANDED NEAR THE EMBASSY. THE SLUGGISH FANK OPERATIONS NORTHWEST OF POCHENTONG WAS FURTHER HAMPERED BY THE LOSS OF SEVERAL POSITIONS. AT NEAK LUONG AND BANAM ON THE MEKONG, FRIENDLY FORCES WERE PUSHED OFF THE ONE ISLAND REMAINING TO THEM, BUT KC PRESSURE ON THE TOWNS THEMSELVES SLACKENED. GOVERNMENT UNITS NORTHWEST OF PHNOM PENH AND ON THE MEKONG EAST BANK OPPOSITE THE CAPITAL INFLECTED HEAVY CASUALTIES ON THE KC, BUT ENEMY PRESSURE IN THESE AREAS IS STILL HEAVY. IN THE BASSAC RIVER CORRIDOR SOUTHEAST OF PHNOM PENH WHICH HAS BEEN QUIET DURING THIS OFFENSIVE, FANK LOST ONE POSITION AND IS NOW ATTEMPTING TO RETAKE IT. PRESSURE

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PHNOM 05377 241339Z

ON PROVINCIAL CAPITALS TAPERED OFF, EXCEPT AT KOMPONG

CHAM IN NORTHEASTERN CAMBODIA. END SUMMARY.

2. BETWEEN FORTY AND FIFTY 107MM ROCKETS LANED ON OR NEAR POCHENTONG AIRFIELD OVER THE PAST TWO DAYS, A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF THEM NEAR THE AIRLIFT OPERATION AREA. HOWEVER, THE DC-8 AND C-130 THAT HAD BEEN DAMAGED BY THE MARCH 22 ATTACK (REFTEL) WERE BOTH FLOWN OUT SAFELY OVER THE WEEKEND. THE AIRLIFT STATED UP AGAIN MARCH 24. THE CITY ALSO RECEIVED ITS SHARE OF ROCKET ATTACKS, NINE FALLING NEAR THE EMBASSY LATE MARCH 23 AND MORE LANDING IN THE SAME LOCATION THE FOLLOWING MORNING AND AFTERNOON.

3. FANK'S OPERATION NORTHWEST OF POCHENTONG AIMED AT ROCKET-LAUNCHING AREAS HAS, AS INDICATED IN PREVIOUS REPORTS, BEEN SLOW FOLLOWING THE RETAKING OF TUOL LEAP. THERE IS NOW EVERN GREATER URGENCY SINCE THE OTHER SIDE HAS SHOWN ITSELF CAPABLE OF INTERRUPTING THE AIRLIFT. IN ADDITION, ONE OF THE PARTICIPATING FANK UNITS JUST TO THE SOUTH OF TUOL LEAP LOST THREE POSITIONS MARCH 22 AND THE EFFORTS TO RETAKE THEM (ONE HAS BEEN RECAPTURED THUS FAR) HAVE FURTHER IMPEDED THE OVERALL EFFORT. INFORMATION TO DATE (MARCH 24) INDICATES A LITTLE PROGRESS IN THE OPERATION.

4. THE ONE REMAINING ISLAND NORTH OF NEAK LUONG ON THE MEKONG WITH A FRIENDLY PRESENCE (REFTEL) FELL TO THE KC. MORE ENCOURAGING WAS THE FACT THAT KC PROBES AND ATTACKS BY FIRE AGAINST BANAM AND NEAK LUONG HAVE SLACKENED CONSIDERABLY OVER THE PAST THIRTY-SIX HOURS.

5. FANK UNITS IN THE 7TH DIVISION AREA NORTHWEST OF PHNOM PENH KILLED OVER 100 KC SOLDIERS IN A CLEARING OPERATION ON ROUTE 51 WHICH RUNS WESTWARD FROM ROUTE 5 THROUGH KEY DIVISION POSITIONS. THESE POSITIONS REMAIN UNDER STEADY ENEMY PRESSURE, PARTICULARLY THE DIVISION LOGISTICS BASE. IN ANOTHER AREA OF HEAVY FIGHTING, FANK FORCES ON THE EAST BANK OF THE MEKONG OPPOSITE PHNOM PENH RESTORED THEIR DEFENSIVE POSITIONS WHICH HAD BEEN

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PHNOM 05377 241339Z

JEOPARDIZED BY ENEMY INFILTRATION (REFTEL) KILLING OVER 60 KC IN THE PROCESS.

6. SECOND DIVISION FORCES IN THE BASSAC CORRIDOR SOUTH-EAST OF PHNOM PENH LOST A POSITION MARCH 22. THIS AREA HAS BEEN QUIET THROUGHOUT THE CURRENT OFFENSIVE. THUS FAR FANK HAS BEEN UNABLE TO RETAKE THE POSITION. THE SETBACK IS NOT IMPORTANT IN ITSELF BUT COULD SIGNAL

A RESURGENCE OF KC ACTIVITY IN THIS SECTOR. THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN FURTHER REPORTS FROM BOTH THE 2ND DIVISION AND 3RD DIVISION AREAS THAT THE COMMUNIST FORCES ARE USING A FORM OF TEAR GAS (REFTEL).

7. THE LEVEL OF KC ACTIVITY AROUND SOME PROVINCIAL CAPITALS, NOTABLY KAMPOT, HAS EASED OFF CONSIDERABLY. AT KOMPONG CHAM, HOWEVER, ON THE UPPER MEKONG, NORTHEAST OF PHNOM PENH, THE KC HAVE FORCED THE ABANDONMENT BY LOCAL DEFENDERS OF SEVERAL POSITIONS. THE PROBLEM STEMS FROM THE NEED TO MAINTAIN AN EXTENDED PERIMETER BECAUSE OF THE AIRPORT, THE MOVEMENT OF FORCES ELSEWHERE AND THE ABSENCE OF THE MILITARY COMMANDER WHO HAS BEEN DETAILED TO NEAK LUONG AND BANAM.
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